

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 703

UD 021 873

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TITLE Parents Favor School Desegregation and Neighborhood Plan, But Reject Busing.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 15p.
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Blacks; *Busing; Community Surveys; *Desegregation Effects; Elementary Secondary Education; Hispanic Americans; Neighborhood Schools; *Parent Attitudes; Public Policy; *Racial Relations; School Desegregation; *Voluntary Desegregation; Whites
IDENTIFIERS *Chicago Public Schools IL

ABSTRACT

A survey of parent attitudes toward desegregation of Chicago (Illinois) public schools was conducted among black, Hispanic and white parents in Chicago. Findings showed no significant difference in responses between the three ethnic groups. Parents favored school desegregation in general, but rejected busing and mandatory desegregation programs in favor of neighborhood schools and voluntary desegregation plans. Most parents did not believe that desegregation would increase academic achievement or help their children get along with children of other races. Over half of them thought that busing would cause middle-class whites to leave Chicago. The findings suggest that if meaningful desegregation is to be achieved in Chicago or in any urban area, an alternative to large scale busing must be found. (Author/MJL)

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PARENTS FAVOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN, BUT REJECT BUSING

by

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School desegregation has ramifications that effect not only the attitudes, achievement and social relations of children involved, but the lives of their parents and teachers and the social and ethnic composition of the communities. Desegregation is based on the assumption that white children attend higher quality schools than black children. As Clark (1978) stated:

It is not the presence of the white child "per se" that leads to higher achievement for the negro child; it is the quality of the education provided because the white child is there that makes the difference (p. 181).

Since the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education (1954), there has been more progress in desegregating schools in the South than in the big cities in the North. It is apparent that big city urban public schools may not ever desegregate, given the decreasing percentage of white to black students.

Parents, educators and politicians alike are ambivalent about the effaciousness of school desegregation. Even Andrew Young, former U.N. Ambassador, now Mayor of Atlanta, found that his child's education was more important than his devotion to integration, when he removed his child from a predominantly white school of poor quality and put his child in higher quality, predominately black school in his neighborhood (Bell 1980).

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Most parents face the same dilemma. Recent surveys have shown that parents reject mandated or forced school integration plans, but favor voluntary plans as long as it includes high quality education for their children. Cusick, Gerbing and Russell (1979) found that Pontiac, Michigan white parents rejected busing out-of-hand. A 1968 poll revealed the 74% of school superintendents and 88% of board of education members rejected busing. In 1979, Serow and Solomon (1979) found that 60% of white and 70% of minority parents favored the concept of desegregation, but rejected all approaches to desegregation except the voluntary approach. A 1980 survey showed the 58% of the black respondents thought black children would receive a better education in white schools. Although 57% would not support busing for racial integration, 73% would support it to achieve quality education (Black Enterprises, 1980). A 1981 PTA study found that a majority of Chicago parents favored school desegregation, based on redrawing school boundaries, but not busing (Schwartz, 1981).

Voluntary vs. mandated desegregation appears to be the major issue. Parents want choices, but not busing.

The Chicago Board of Education has been attempting to formulate a practical and politically accepted school desegregation plan to meet the U.S. Dept. of Education (HEW) guidelines for a decade. The latest plan includes school clusters, magnet schools and a voluntary transfer plan, but not busing.

A practical consideration is that the approximately 500,000 student population is only 17% white, 19% latino, 60% black and 4% asian and other. Black/white desegregation is basically a moot issue.

How do Chicago parents feel about school desegregation?

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE

To determine Chicago parents' attitudes toward desegregation of Chicago Public Schools, 547 Chicago parents were surveyed. The sample included 229 (42%) blacks, 251 (45%) latinos and 64 (11%) whites. Eighty-six percent had children in the Chicago public schools.

RESULTS

The findings were tabulated in percentages and the chi square test was employed at the .05 level of significance.

Responses to the 29 item questionnaire are in Table 1. The findings showed that 55% of parents favored integration in general and the voluntary plan (60%), specifically majority of parents (68%) also favored the neighborhood school plan. Although the majority favored integration in general, 76% rejected a mandated plan and 65% rejected busing. Also parents (41%) agreed that busing would not make the schools better. Similarly only 28% of the parents believed school integration would enhance students achievement. On the other hand, 51% of the parents indicated integration would help student "to get along with people of different races."

Their overall rejection of busing was graphically reinforced by their response to the questions, "What is the longest time you would be willing to be bused?" in which 47% of the parents stated they wanted no busing at all. When asked "At which grade level would they be willing to be bused?" 23% favored high school, but 43% "wanted no busing." Also when parents were asked "how many students should be bused -- 30,000, 50,000, 100,000 students," 58% stated there should be no busing."

The majority opinion against busing but for the voluntary, neighborhood school plan was reflected in the multiple choice question, "I would not like to be bused because" (sample could select more than one choice); 35% of the parents said it was "too inconvenient;" 35% said "I like the present school," and 28% stated "I'm against busing."

The data indicate that most parents felt it was too late to use forced desegregation and instead the school board should improve the quality of the community schools. "Busing does not change attitudes." But it "will only make whites leave the city." As one parent stated, "I surely wouldn't want my children bused out of the neighborhood I worked so hard to be in. The neighborhood would lose its identity and closeness with the school environment."

Another parent summed up the responses of others: "Busing children to achieve integration only in the debt-ridden system would be intolerable if you don't have money to offer something 'special' at the end of the line, you cannot justify wasting

millions on busing and gas."

Latino parents were adamantly against integration and especially busing. They felt it would destroy their bilingual education programs, and the cultural climate of the schools and the community. The parents were particularly apprehensive about the safety of their children on the buses and in distant schools.

Parents consistently rejected busing, by a 76% negative response to "Would you like to be bused to a good school in a good community?" Also 58% said no to "Would you like to be bused into a racially different community?"

When asked, "What racial percentages would you like in the schools?" 40% of parents chose fifty percent of each race, and 39% stated "It would not matter."

However parents did not object to the race of the teacher. Seventy-three percent rejected the notion that the teacher should be of the same race as the students.

Although parents rejected busing, 65% stated that they would not move out of the city if bused. Nor would 49% of parents transfer to private (parochial) schools to keep from being bused. These latter responses may seem contradictory on face value. Since 88% of the sample was black and latino and mostly of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, they would not have the same residential and educational mobility nor the financial resources of the white middle socioeconomic population.

Also the issue of busing appeared to depend on whom was

being bused. When asked, "Would you want students of other races bused to your school?" Forty-seven percent of students and forty-three percent of parents stated "yes". But when responding to: "Would you like to be bused into a racially different school?" 68% of students and 58% of parents stated "no."

DISCUSSION

An analysis of the findings showed there was no significant difference in responses between the three ethnic groups. The parents appear to accept integration on the basis of improving race relations, but not academic achievement. Only improving the quality of the neighborhood schools, which the majority favors, will enhance achievement. Black parents felt black schools were academically inferior to white schools, while latinos believed their schools to be good. All ethnic groups preferred to remain in their neighborhood school; and only black parents favored other ethnic/racial groups being bused to their school. Some parents suggested a pilot-study or trial desegregation of some of the Chicago schools, prior to a implementation of a system-wide plan.

Results demonstrate that although parents favor the principle of school desegregation in general (55%), they reject busing (60%) and mandatory desegregation programs (75.9%) in favor of neighborhood schools (68.2%) and voluntary desegregation plans (60%). Similar findings by Sarow and Soloman (1979) showed that a majority of both minority and white parents supported the idea of school desegregation but that levels of support

sharply decreased among both groups when asked to consider approaches to desegregation, with both groups rejecting all approaches except the free-choice method. Findings by Ogletree (1976) indicated a similar attitude by Chicago teachers toward desegregation and plans of implementation.

Findings also revealed that a majority of parents disfavored all busing-related issues. Opinion polls by Nation's Schools (1968), Harris (1972) and Chicago area P.T.A.s (Schwartz 1981) indicated that busing was unpopular among the majority of respondents. Findings by Giles et. al. (1974), Cusik et. al. (1979) and Harris (1972) showed that whites : almost uniformly opposed busing. On the other hand, Harris (1972) found that more than half of the blacks in a national sample (52%) favored busing as a means of racially balancing schools.

Although busing was generally disfavored as a means of desegregating schools, 52.5 percent of the parents would allow their children to be bused to improve educational opportunities. In a survey of opinion on busing, Black Enterprise (August 1980) found that 57.3 percent of the respondents would not support busing to achieve racial desegregation, but a significant majority (72.9%) would support busing to achieve quality education. Fear for their children's safety was the most frequent reason given by parents as a reason for rejecting busing.

A majority of parents did not believe that desegregation would increase their children's academic achievement (46.4%)

nor improve the quality of schools (56.9%). A review of the literature on the effects of desegregation on student-attitudes and academic achievement revealed that there was no conclusive evidence of positive or negative effects of desegregation. Jencks et. al. (1975) and Prewitt (1971) found that desegregation had negative effects on the academic achievement of desegregated blacks. While Williams et. al (1968) and Shellenberg et. al. (1976) found no significant difference in the performance of segregated and desegregated blacks. On the other hand, Lemke's (1979) findings indicated specific increases in achievement for both black and whites on ITBS.

On the issues of social relationships more than half of the parents did not think that desegregation would help their children get along with children of different races. Cuseck et. al. (1973) found that racial interaction between white and black students, in a desegregated high school, was minimal to non-existent. While Mahan's (1968) findings showed that bused children were selected by their suburban classmates in a proportion slightly greater than their numerical proportion in the classroom, on sociometric measures.

In contrast to parents attitudes, Erbe (1977), Johnson (1977), and the Fort Wayne Urban League (1977) found that students, in general, felt that attendance at a desegregated school would be useful in helping them to get along with people of different races as well as in coping with new situations.

Finding also showed that 55 percent of the parents thought that busing would cause middle class whites to leave Chicago.

Armor (1979) and Cusick et. al. (1979) found that many white families move from urban areas to escape busing. Coleman (1978), Banas (1977), and Bell (1980) maintain that "white flight" has made desegregation of urban areas almost impossible. Coleman (1975) suggests that ways must be found to attract middle class blacks and whites back into urban schools if progress is to be made towards achieving desegregation.

The findings in this study suggest that, if meaningful desegregation is to be achieved in Chicago or in any urban area , an alternative to large-scale busing must be found. The Chicago Public School System must develop innovative educational programs to attract whites back into the system as well as for the purpose of providing quality education to motivate all Chicago Public School children.

These findings suggest that the courts will have less and less influence in ordering busing to desegregate school. Since the consent decree for desegregation of Chicago schools includes community input and hearing, court-ordered busing does not appear to be a realistic option for Chicago either. Also desegregation proponents have a reason to be disheartened in light of Reagan's anti-busing policy and budget cutbacks. School desegregation is a possibility but busing is not.

TABLE I
Parents Attitudes Toward School Desegregation

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Parents Responses (%)</u> (N=547)		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Do you favor school integration?	55	38	8
2. Do you favor a volunteer integration plan?	60	34	8
3. Do you favor mandated or forced integration?	14	76	10
4. Do you favor attending a neighborhood school?	68	17	15
5. Do you favor busing to integrate the schools?	26	65	9
6. Would school integration help students' achievement?	28	46	25
7. Would integration help students to get along with people of different races?	51	33	17
8. Would busing make the schools better?	18	57	25
9. Would you want students of other races bused to your school?	43	40	17
10. Do you think businesses would leave the city if there were busing?	18	45	37
11. Do you/your children have friends from lower social classes?	72	21	8
12. Would you/your children like to be bused into a racially different school?	30	58	12
13. Do you/your children have friends of other ethnics or races?	10	65	25
14. Do you/your children attend Access to Excellence Program?	19	66	15
15. If so, do you like the program?	24	26	50

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Parents Responses (%)</u> (N=547)		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
16. Would you like to be bused into a good school in a poor community?	38	53	9
17. Would you like to be bused into an average school in a good community?	30	57	14
18. Would you like to be bused into a good school in a good community?	14	77	9
19. Does the social class level of the school influence your opinion of integration?	23	53	23
20. Do you think you would move out of the city to keep from being bused?	18	65	17
21. Would students transfer to a private school to keep from being bused?	34	49	17
22. Should teachers be of the same race as the students?	15	73	12
23. Are there enough white students in Chicago Public Schools to really integrate the schools?	17	55	30
24. Busing will cause the following people to leave the city:	<u>Parents</u>		
a. Blacks	11%		
b. Whites	55%		
c. Latinos	14%		
d. None will leave the city	30%		
25. Which racial percentage would you like in your school?			
a. 50% of your race, 50% of another race	40%		
b. 75% of your race/25% of another race	10%		
c. 25% of your race/75% of another race	3%		
d. It doesn't matter.	39%		
e. Schools should be of one race	8%		

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|-----|--|----------------|
| 26. | What is the longest time you would be willing (your children) to be bused? | <u>Parents</u> |
| a. | 10 minutes | 17% |
| b. | 20 minutes | 10% |
| c. | 30 minutes | 10% |
| d. | 1 hour or more | 10% |
| e. | Not at all | 47% |
| 27. | At which grade level would you be willing to be bused? | |
| a. | K-3 grades | 10% |
| b. | 4-6 grades | 10% |
| c. | 7-8 grades | 14% |
| d. | high school | 23% |
| e. | I want no busing. | 43% |
| 28. | I would <u>not</u> like to be bused because:
(Can circle more than one) | |
| a. | too inconvenient | 35% |
| b. | get up too early | 29% |
| c. | afraid for my safety | 5% |
| d. | like my present school | 35% |
| e. | I am against busing | 28% |
| f. | too far to travel | 33% |
| g. | will not increase achievement | 19% |
| 29. | How many students should be bused to accomplish integration? | |
| a. | 30,000 students | 20% |
| b. | 50,000 students | 8% |
| c. | 100,000 students | 14% |
| d. | There should be no busing? | 58% |

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